

## Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 4282

S E C R E T SAIGON 3697

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AEMR, VS

SUBJECT: REFUGEE EVACUATION FROM DANANG

REF: STATE 070169

1. AT THIS WRITING (1600 28 MARCH) ONLY THING CLEAR ABOUT SITUATION IN DANANG IS THAT IT IS BAD. PRECISE SITUATION IS NOT CLEAR, NOR ARE NEAR TERM PROSPECTS. CONSULATE GENERAL IS NOT ABLE TO FUNCTION; NEITHER FRANCIS NOR REMAINING MEMBERS OF HIS STAFF ARE IN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH SAIGON.

2. INTERACTING FACTORS WHICH PRODUCED AND ARE HOURLY COMPOUNDING DANANG SITUATION INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

A. IN MILITARY SPHERE, TRUONG'S STILL EFFECTIVE AND ORGANIZED DEFENSIVE FORCE SEEMS TO BE LIMITED TO THE MARINE DIVISION AND PART OF THE 3RD ARVN DIVISION, TOTALLING JUST OVER 10,000 TROOPS, WITH WHAT APPEAR TO BE MINIMAL ARTILLERY AND AIR SUPPORT. NVA MAIN FORCE UNITS WHICH APPEAR TO BE AVAILABLE FOR ATTACK ON DANANG INCLUDE FOUR NVA DIVISIONS (324B, 325, 304, 2ND) PLUS OTHER INDEPENDENT REGIMENTS PLUS CONSIDERABLE ARTILLERY OR ROCKETS AND AT LEAST SOME ARMOR (TOTALLING A CONSERVATIVELY ESTIMATED 33,000).

B. DANANG IS SWOLLEN WITH WHAT IS CERTAINLY AROUND A MILLION REFUGEES AND THE ACTUAL NUMBER MAY BE CLOSE TO 1.5 MILLION, PLUS THE NORMAL POPULATION OF ABOUT 500,000 WHO ARE NOW THEMSELVES "REFUGEES." THIS SHEER MASS, EVEN IF ORDERLY AND CALM, WOULD

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STRAIN CIVIL GOVERNMENT TO THE BREAKING POINT.

C. THE POPULACE OF DANANG IS NEITHER ORDERLY NOR CALM. THE AIRPORT IS BEING MOBBED AS ARE VIRTUALLY ALL CONCEIVABLE SHIP AND PORT EMBARKATION POINTS. KNOWLEDGE THAT THE MILITARY SITUATION IS FRAGILE HAS INTENSIFIED FRIGHT. FURTHER COMPOUNDING THE PROBLEM ARE A LARGE NUMBER (PERHAPS SEVERAL THOUSAND) ARMED ARVN STRAGGLERS FROM SEVERAL ARVN DIVISIONS WHO HAVE NO COHESION, ORDER OR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE. YOU HAVE, IN SHORT, A CITY UNDER SEIGE AND PERHAPS ON THE

VERGE OF BEING UNDER ATTACK WITH OVER TWO MILLION PEOPLE MILLING AROUND, MANY OUT OF CONTROL, AND EFFECTIVE LAW AND ORDER (LET ALONE GOVERNMENT) BREAKING DOWN.

3. THE ABOVE IS SOMETHING RESEMBLING THE REAL WORLD. TALK OF AN ORDERLY EVACUATION, UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, IS NOT, NOR IS "QUESTION OF SECURE REDEPLOYMENT SITES FOR REFUGEES" SINCE NO GUARANTEE CAN BE GIVEN THAT ANY LOCATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM CAN BE CONSIDERED SAFE SO LONG AS BOTH NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAMESE ACT UNDER ASSUMPTION THAT U.S. WILL DO LITTLE, IF ANYTHING, TO AID SOUTH VIETNAM EVEN IN FACE OF OUTRIGHT MILITARY INVASION FROM THE NORTH, AND SO LONG AS THERE CONTINUES TO BE UNCERTAINTY ABOUT CONTINUITY AND MAGNITUDE OF AMERICAN AID.

4. WHAT IS CRYSTAL CLEAR IS THAT WELL OVER A MILLION HUMAN BEINGS --

PROBABLY NOW CLOSER TO 1.5 MILLION HAVE CHOSEN TO TAKE WHATEVER RISKS FLIGHT MIGHT ENTAIL RATHER THAN TO REMAIN IN TERRITORIES COMING UNDER CONTROL OF NORTH VIETNAM, WHICH HAS NOW SENT MORE THAN FOUR ADDITIONAL DIVISIONS INTO SOUTH VIETNAM IN CYNICAL EXPECTATIONS THAT UNITED STATES WILL CONTINUE ITS PRESENT PARALYSIS. THE MORAL DILEMMA THIS SITUATION POSES FOR THE UNITED STATES IS OBVIOUS. AS FAR AS WE KNOW THERE ARE NO LEGAL LIMITATIONS WHICH WOULD BAR THE UNITED STATES FROM USING WHATEVER ASSETS MAY BE AVAILABLE TO IT, INCLUDING ITS MILITARY LIFT CAPACITIES, BOTH AIR AND SEA, TO MEET THIS

WHOLLY HUMANITARIAN REQUIREMENT. WE SIMPLY DO NOT BELIEVE THERE WOULD BE MORE THAN PRO-FORMA TOKEN CRITICISM FROM EITHER PRESS OR CONGRESSIONAL OPPONENTS OF THE RVN IF THE USG TOOK PROMPT AND EFFECTIVE ACTION TO QUICKLY MOVE THESE REFUGEES FROM DANANG, IF INDEED IT IS STILL POSSIBLE TO DO SO.

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5. PENDING CLARIFICATION OF THE LATTER POINT, AND ASSUMING EFFECTIVE ACTION IS STILL POSSIBLE, WE BELIEVE FOLLOWING COURSES OF ACTION SHOULD

BE CONSIDERED:

A. THE USG SHOULD, IN RESPONSE TO GVN APPEAL, CALL WORLD ATTENTION TO SPECIFIC SITUATION AT DANANG RESULTING FROM RENEWED

NVN INVASION AND STATE IT WAS DEPLOYING USG NAVAL AND AIR FORCES TO ASSIST IN REMOVING THESE REFUGEES TO SAFETY.

B. CALL ON OTHER NATIONS, I.E., AUSTRALIA, JAPAN, PHILIPPINES, ROC TO ASSIST.

C. NOTIFY SOVIET UNION AND PRC WE UNDERTAKING THIS ACTION AND ASSUME THEY WILL CAUTION HANOI NOT TO INTERFERE WITH WHAT IS, FOR THE PRESENT, INTENDED TO BE LIMITED TO A WHOLLY HUMANITARIAN ACTION OF EVACUATION.

D. CONSIDER TAKING A CALCULATED RISK OF USING THOSE USG MILITARY RESOURCES NOW DEDICATED FOR STAND-BY FOR CAMBODIAN EVACUATION TO IMMEDIATELY ASSIST IN DANANG REFUGEE EVACUATION.

6. ALTHOUGH ONE WORLD AIRWAYS 727 FLIGHT WAS MADE TODAY FURTHER FLIGHTS INTO DANANG HAVE BEEN STOOD DOWN TEMPORARILY WHILE EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE TO RESTORE ADEQUATE SECURITY AND CONTROL AT THE AIRFIELD. IN CALLS TODAY ON PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER WITH GENERAL WEYAND, AMBASSADOR STRESSED NECESSITY TO RESTORE MODICUM OF CROWD DISCIPLINE AT AIRPORT AND SEAPORT TO PERMIT REASONABLY ORDERLY EVACUATION OF REFUGEES. GENERAL WEYAND MADE SAME POINT IN CALL ON GENERAL VIEN, CHAIRMAN JGS, WHO HAS GOTTEN IN TOUCH WITH GENERAL TRUONG WITH PROMISE OF MP BATTALION FROM AIRBORNE DIVISION.

7. SEA LIFT SITUATION IS MUCH EASIER TO CONTROL. ONE MSC SHIP IS NOW LOADING BY USING BARGES TO SHUTTLE REFUGEES FROM SHORE TO SHIP THUS ENABLING CONTROL OF THE SITUATION AND SECOND SHIP IS ARRIVING LATER TODAY. SIMILAR TECHNIQUES CAN BE USED FOR FOLLOW ON VESSELS. LSTS WOULD PROVIDE ADDITIONAL FLEXIBILITY FOR POSSIBLE OFF THE BEACH LOADING.

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8. BEST TO CONCENTRATE EFFORT AT THIS TIME ON SEA LIFT EVACUATION WHILE BEING READY TO RESUME AND EXPAND AIRLIFT ON MINIMUM NOTICE. WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT COMBINATION OF SEA LIFT WHICH WILL RELIEVE PRESSURES AND GVN EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH BETTER CONTROL AT AIRFIELD WILL ENABLE US TO RESUME AIRLIFT SOON.

9. BY TOMORROW WE SHOULD HAVE CLEARER PICTURE OF PUBLIC ORDER SITUATION IN DANANG REPORT. MEANWHILE, WE WOULD APPRECIATE REACTIONS TO SUGGESTIONS CONTAINED IN PARAGRAPH 5 ABOVE.  
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